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The Biology Curator

Title: The National Biodiversity Network

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operate by referring back to data providers before allowing access to records, so data provider sensitivities must be kept to a minimum, although of course respected. Data providers must trust the LRC to operate within the constraints of an agreed confidentiality policy. The most valid reason for keeping a (very small) proportion of records confidential, in most circumstances, is not data provider sensitivity but risk of wildlife abuse (rare bird nesting sites etc).

9. Voucher specimens. I have few problems with this as written, although it requires very careful thought. Any strengthening of this aspect (e.g. requiring LRCs to hold collections of their own, or requiring voucher specimens to be collected in certain types of project) would be strongly resisted. The proposed policy does rather beg the question as to whether museums and recognised research institutes have the desire and resources to receive voucher specimens. Furthermore, where should the onus of validation lie?

12. Archives. I have not seen BS-5454 so can't comment fully. I would be concerned that the standard might not be directly relevant to biological records and might generate unreasonable administrative burdens on the LRC.

13. Staff. I don't understand the wording of this. If it is saying that an LRC could operate with a geologist and a part-time administrator, I beg to differ. The minimum staff requirements of LRCs are those required to deliver a full service to local partner organisations and the public, and to meet the requirement of the National Biodiversity Network. In my view (and that of the CCBR report — *Biological Recording in the UK 1995*) this minimum requirement is 3 full-time staff.

Other comments of lesser concern are:

5. Access to Records. Allowing visitors to access any data held on disk would be extremely difficult to operate in practice and raise serious concerns among providers of data to the LRC.

6. National Recording Schemes. Forwarding of data to national species recording schemes is certainly desirable but must be accompanied by systems for the national BRC to supply data to LRCs. The periodicity may need to be more frequent than annual.

14. Legality of data collection. We must be extremely careful with words on this subject. I am not sure whether there is an accepted definition of "illegal". We should avoid the thorny issue of the receipt of data collected by third parties from public rights of way or by technical trespass. LRC policies should specify protocols only for data collection by in-house staff and commissioned surveys.

16. Data Recording Facilities. I don't know what is meant by "data recording facilities". I agree with the principle that an LRC should cover all taxonomic groups (and all habitats, and all sites across the full geographical range that the LRC covers, including the marine environment, where relevant, for that matter).

The National Biodiversity Network

Since my last report, things have been progressing. Three Pilot Projects have been chosen. These are funded by the Wildlife Trust Partnership's Esme Fairburn Trust grant. They are in Cheshire, Powys & the Brecon Beacons National Park and North East Scotland. Small groups in each of the three countries met to examine all of the bids and produced shortlists for the Local Advisory Group to consider. These shortlists included a preferred option in each case. These preferred options were those chosen and endorsed by the LAG. The four posts have been advertised (a Project Manager and three Support Officers) with a closing date of 13 November. The Manager will be based in Lincoln whereas the three Support Officers will be based at the respective project sites.

As part of the project a study has been commissioned to run from November to February to develop Operational Standards and Good Practice Guidelines. This will review existing information, including all the information submitted as part of past national surveys. It will then focus on a small number of existing LRCs to see how they operate. The information will then be available for further discussion. As a BCG representative I want to ensure that effective use is made of existing biological recording expertise. We have been running records centres for over twenty years, so the accumulated experience is considerable.

The end products of this will be

- an assessment of the scale of involvement and the range of people involved within individual LRCs
- an evaluation of existing procedures and services provided
- examples of case studies for use by pilot LRCs
- a database of existing LRCs and organisations carrying out similar functions at a local level
- evaluation of value of existing work and recommendations to LAG on the next steps.

The results will feed into the pilot project development plan process and be a foundation for the development of Accreditation Standards.

The Lottery Bid

A bid has been put together for consideration by the Heritage Lottery Fund for a National Biodiversity Network, roughly along the lines of the original Millennium Bid. Bolton, Ipswich, Leicestershire, Bristol and Nottingham Museums financed the cost of Dave Mellor being involved on the group authoring the bid. This enabled BCG to be involved, which was previously impossible due to the time commitments of all other BCG members who are involved. This must be an important consideration when thinking about the Association mentioned below.

Association of Local Records Centres

A proposal has been developed to form an Association of Local Records Centres. This is a part of the NBN proposals, but it is hoped to create this body sooner rather than later! You should be contacted during the next few weeks if you

run a records centre for your views about such a body. This is not a replacement for BCG or NFBR. It may be a body of only institutional members and it may have to consider the sort of membership fees that enable it to pay for representation on NBN committees and working parties. Please DO RESPOND to this because it will shape the future development of the NBN Network.

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Cell 'members' (i.e. the people who help me with all this)

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Graham Walley, Nottingham Museums 0115 915 3900

Keith Bloor, Stoke Museum 01782 202173

Nick Moyes, Derby Museum 01332 255586

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Derek Whiteley, Sheffield Museums 01142 768588

Kate Andrew, Ludlow Museum 01584 873857

Nick Gordon, Buckinghamshire Museums 01296 696012

Biology Curators Group Study Trip Paris, 7-10th November, 1996

The assembled throng of biology curators at Waterloo were soon herded aboard Eurostar and after clunking through the Kent countryside and a brief 20 minutes in the tunnel emerged in France, which looked remarkably like the English countryside we had left behind but going past at greater speed.

Arrival at Gare Du Nord in Paris was complicated by what turned out to be a bomb scare, which passed most people by, and as the hotel was only a few hundred metres from the station many people elected to walk. The Hotel Orange was located in a side street just off Lafayette not far from Montmartre and memories of the crush at Waterloo station were revisited as everyone acquired their keys in the compact and bijou hotel reception. After clothes were unpacked and hotel facilities explored people set off for food, sightseeing and possibly the odd beer or two. Our little group had a pleasant meal in a Turkish restaurant once we had translated the Turkish into French menu into English, all with barely a French 'O' Level between us.

Next morning tales of Paris nightlife, bars and ballet were swapped over breakfast and maps consulted to sort out routes to the Muséum National D'Histoire Naturelle.

Navigating the Paris Metro proved much less trouble than the London Underground, and a few trains and a short walk later we arrived at the Jardin des Plantes and the Museum. The museum itself is set in a large public garden complete with tropical glass house and zoo. Set outside the main entrance to the museum were two large display cases offering a taster for 'Meteors', the temporary exhibition inside. One case contained a large meteor weighing several tons on open access, and the other a large American car which had been hit on the boot by a meteor about half the size of a football, which had unsurprisingly meted out some hefty damage to said cars boot.

Not having been on the previous Paris trip the interior of the museum was a real surprise. Inside the museum is essentially a large hall which reminded me of a very large impressive Victorian railway station, with mezzanine floors running round the walls. It was also quite dark but certainly did not feel gloomy or oppressive. A brief introductory talk was then given by Genevieve Meurges and a colleague about the history of the museum and the development of the current galleries while stood in front of two very impressive skeletons of whales. Then into the museum proper to view the new displays with some people taking a guided tour and others opting to view independently.

The ground floor continued the oceanic theme set by the whale skeletons with some very impressive marine displays. Traditional dioramas had been eschewed in favour of a more minimalist display technique with much use of glass and perspex to mount and display specimens. Like the rest of the museum it was quite dark but very effective use of spotlights and fibre optics illuminated the specimens well and the overall effect was quite atmospheric. Spirit specimens of jellyfish and other soft bodied marine animals were displayed particularly well on a blue background, with each specimen illuminated by individual micro-spots. One impressive technique was achieved by attaching specimens from the back onto glass panels which were lit from the bottom using different coloured light filters to create an underwater effect. Marine plants and algae were displayed in a similar way sandwiched between perspex and glass sheets. Diagrams and scales were often ground into the glass giving it an interpretative use as well as acting as a barrier such as with the marine plants and invertebrates display graded from littoral to a depth of 200 metres, with specimens placed at

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Per Alstrom is trying to trace the holotype of *Seicerus b. burkii* (Yellow-eyed Flycatcher Warbler). It was originally lodged in the Army Medical Department, Chatham, UK but a search there has proved unsuccessful. If you can help with further information please contact:

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